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# THE UHNW INSTITUTE

## FAMILY OFFICE SOLUTIONS FOR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

▶ Understanding and Utilizing Care  
Management for Families

# INTRODUCTION

Family office professionals support the multifaceted needs of ultra-high net worth (UHNW) families, and they utilize holistic skill sets to address a range of challenges. However, when a family member asks for help related to an issue of physical or mental well-being, family office professionals may find themselves in situations requiring expertise beyond their training. They may also encounter tense family dynamics, resistance to accepting help, and ongoing crises that may complicate their roles as trusted advisors.

The field of *care management* has developed in the past several decades to assist families, family office professionals, and other legal and financial advisors. Care managers assess, coordinate, and implement specialized solutions across a range of clinical issues, often on an urgent basis with very complicated situations. This article will discuss the role of care management, its various applications, the value for UHNW families, and how family office professionals can evaluate care managers and introduce them to their clients.



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# A CASE EXAMPLE

*The Smith Family is a third-generation family from Minneapolis who experienced a successful sale of their manufacturing business seven years ago and hired Gerard to run their family office. The four members of the current generation—Julie, Debby, Mark and John—are in their early to mid-50s and contending with common yet severe pressures of having aging parents. Five years ago, their father, Jim, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. With his ongoing decline, he and Melissa, the matriarch, moved into a senior living community. Recently, Melissa was diagnosed with breast cancer, causing her to become anxious and depressed.*

*One morning, sister Debby received a call from the program director at Shady Hill Senior Living Facility. Debby was told that her father had fallen in his unit. The program director was recommending that the family hire nurses for support. Already frustrated by the lack of involvement of her siblings, Debby sent a strongly worded text message to her older sister, Julie, sharing her frustration and need for support given their mother’s inability to make decisions.*

*Upon receiving the text, Julie rolled her eyes and called her brother Mark to vent. He brushed off Debby’s attitude and said that Debby should just call Gerard to figure out a solution. Mark also shared that he had already spoken to Gerard about his son, Liam, who has a substance use issue that needs to be addressed. Irritated by his dismissal, Julie hung up the phone and thought momentarily about calling her younger brother, John, but then decided against it. John could never make a decision and was already confused about which doctor to choose to help their mother with her breast cancer diagnosis. So, Julie called the family office, laid out all of the various issues, and asked Gerard for his help.*

Like many families, the Smith Family has numerous issues that need attention—mental health, physical well-being, and family dynamics. Hired for his strong investment track record, Gerard feels ill-equipped to navigate a course forward for each family member, make appropriate referrals, and manage the family dynamics. He is also acutely aware there may be financial, legal, and risk management issues to be coordinated.

# THE FAMILY OFFICE'S SOLUTION: ENLISTING CARE MANAGEMENT FOR THE CRISIS

Most families are like the Smiths in that one of the adult siblings unwittingly and begrudgingly gets identified as point person, responsible for coordinating care, monitoring progress, and troubleshooting. This individual may or may not have the skills, temperament, knowledge, or connections to fulfill the role. With UHNW families, a family office professional is likely to be approached next without necessarily having much better qualifications. But the Smiths were fortunate in that Gerard had heard the term “care coordinator” through a peer networking group. He soon learned that these professionals had the skills to address Melissa’s medical care, Liam’s substance use, and Jim’s progressive Alzheimer’s symptoms. Professional care coordinators, case managers, and health advocates can be an effective solution for families like the Smiths.

The term “care management” is used in a variety of contexts, from hospital settings to insurance companies. Related, often interchangeable terms are “health advocacy” or “case management.” Affluent families typically hire a care manager or health advocate to navigate medical or psychiatric systems, provide treatment options to family members, and assist with creating a plan that balances the preferences of multiple family members.

A simple way to view the role of a care manager/advocate is as a “general contractor” for mental and physical health. They typically offer some services directly and coordinate the remaining needs from outsourced providers. Care managers exist in a variety of fields, including mental health, geriatric care, substance abuse, and medical care. Their credentials may be degrees in nursing, social work, medicine, psychology, or neuropsychology, or they might lack an advanced degree but have training in a specific area, e.g., crisis intervention. Most care managers cover one specialty, such as geriatric or mental health, as well as some services in a related field. Regardless of

specialization, their unique value as professionals helps support families and family office executives when acute problems arise.

# WHAT CARE MANAGERS CAN PROVIDE

The most important services care managers can provide will be assessing and vetting providers, finding advocacy and legal support, and helping manage family dynamics.

## Assessing and vetting providers

Care managers can help evaluate providers, including various types of facilities (residential programs, assisted living facilities, nursing homes), clinicians (therapists, psychiatrists, nutritionists, and others), and medical professionals (concierge physicians, in-home nursing aides). In the Smith case, the family office hired Sally, a geriatric care manager, who vetted a team of in-home nurses and planned that if the patriarch Jim's needs increased, she could determine which nursing facilities might be good matches.

By hiring care managers, family office professionals do not have to navigate an unfamiliar field and risk making a poor referral. They can also remove themselves and other family members from serving as “default case managers.” Most importantly, care managers can provide options for clients to age in a way that honors their preferences. Joanna Gordon Martin, founder of concierge geriatric care company Theia Senior Solutions, has said that clients who hire her firm *before* a crisis preserve options for family members: “This is about empowering older adults to have choice. Without a plan in place, when the need for help comes, the options may be limited, and the choices go away.”

## Advocacy and logistical support

While finding high quality providers is the first step, UHNW families also need help

with the various administrative tasks, such as advocacy and logistical support, that come with managing a medical or psychiatric diagnosis. For the Smiths, the family office found Dr. Timothy Butler, a physician and private medical advocate. His role would be to help Melissa, the matriarch with breast cancer, find a qualified doctor that she liked, collate her records, and attend appointments with her to ensure that information was captured and recorded accurately.

Jennifer Kolchinsky MSN, ANP-BC, founder of health management group OneVision Health, describes her role with families:

As health managers, we work directly for the patient to ensure that the best possible medical outcomes are achieved. In its most basic form, advocacy provides comfort, logistical support, and perspective to a patient learning about a new ailment and treatment. We take things a step further with our training as nurse practitioners to promote best practices, hold providers accountable, and ensure no stone is unturned in the pursuit of establishing the perfect medical plan.

## Managing family dynamics

Perhaps the most important role a care manager takes on is that of a calm, objective presence in an otherwise nervous family system. For both the individual and their family members, medical and psychiatric issues bring a range of emotions to the surface, including fear, anger, sadness, and frustration. As an example, when Gerard in the family office spoke to Mark about his son, Liam, it was clear that Liam's parents had differing perspectives on how to best support their son and that their emotional responses were fueling an already difficult dynamic.

Diana Clark, the Chief of Clinical Operations at O'Connor Professional Group, elaborates: "Without an objective and educated resource, families often struggle to agree on the 'right' approach in cases of behavioral health. They seek opinions from unqualified sources, and they become more vulnerable to destructive family dynamics." Care managers unite family members around a cohesive plan and help decrease the amount of tension among family members by providing concrete options and monitoring progress toward goals.

# HOW CARE MANAGERS CAN MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR ALL

Family office executives hire care managers to ensure that families have the best possible medical and psychiatric care. They themselves benefit from the support of these professionals in the following ways:

## Clinical guidance

Family office executives don't have to guess at solutions or attempt to vet providers in areas where they lack expertise. Care managers can also help family office executives plan over the long-term and strategize when they encounter resistance from a family member.

## Outstanding Communication

Outstanding communication can be achieved in four ways. First, articulate the family's values, strategic goals and mission, then ensure each member of the family's wealth ecosystem understands them. Second, maintain an effective planning schedule, conduct frequent meetings with the team and create detailed minutes that document the decisions made, issues to be addressed and actions to be taken. Make sure responsibilities for tasks, expected deliverables and timetables are clear. Third, manage a disciplined process that ensures execution and follow-up. Fourth, include external advisors in relevant communication.

## Logistical support

Medical and psychiatric issues require a fair amount of administrative support including collating records, completing insurance documentation, coordinating among providers, and monitoring implementation of services. Care managers can focus their attention on these details and report progress to family office executives, relieving them of having to provide that oversight.

## Legal and financial implications

Medical and psychiatric issues frequently have risk management, legal, and financial implications. While family office executives may have to bring in relevant expertise in those domains, the care manager may be able to provide creative solutions to the advisory team or in a court related matter, e.g., paying privately for a mental health facility to mitigate a sentence for a criminal charge. They can also provide helpful advice as to the appropriateness of financial distributions to an impaired beneficiary.

# THE ROLE OF THE ADVISOR WITH CARE MANAGEMENT

A priority of family offices and high-end wealth advisory firms is to find the best possible resources for the families they serve. Care managers ensure that clients get access to high quality care and have a coordinated plan, ideally with family engagement. Given the sensitive nature of medical and psychiatric issues, family office executives need to closely evaluate, select, and then collaborate with care managers.

Questions for the advisor to consider include the following:

- **What types of credentials, training, and experience do each of the agencies/ individuals have?** Check for relevant licensure, the longevity of the business, and what education each professional has received.
- **Is it better to hire an individual or an agency?** There are benefits and disadvantages to either approach. Family office executives should consider the nature of the engagement—how long the family will require support and the acuity of the situation. With shorter-term, straightforward assignments, an individual practitioner may work well. Independent care managers are also typically less expensive than those in larger agencies. For longer-term needs, it may be preferable to have an agency with greater infrastructure and access to multiple, qualified professionals.



- **How easily can agencies integrate into complex, wealthy family systems?** Although medical and psychiatric issues impact individuals from all demographic groups, UHNW families benefit from providers who understand the following dynamics in addition to the medical or psychiatric diagnoses:
  - Heightened sensitivity around privacy and discretion
  - Unlimited financial resources that can allow an individual to continue dysfunctional behavior and prevent natural consequences from occurring
  - Increased vulnerability to unethical providers who may suggest inappropriate treatment due to perceived status and the presumption of unlimited monetary resources
  - Lifestyles that include travel, social situations filled with risks, and pressures making commitment to a clinical or medical agent more challenging
  - Large teams of clinical, financial, and legal professionals that require communication and inclusion
  - High expectations around customer service and availability during off hours

Given this long list of considerations, many family office professionals find that seeking care managers largely through a colleague's recommendation or a professional peer network is the safest choice.

# HOW TO INTRODUCE THE CONCEPT OF CARE MANAGEMENT TO THE FAMILY

Suggesting that a family needs professional support can be a delicate subject. The approach, method of communication, and tone will depend on the specific circumstances of the care and the family. Here are some ideas for how to introduce the concept of care management:

- Find ways to introduce professional support during planning conversations (e.g., drafting of trust and estate documents or organizing family gatherings)
- Utilize crises as opportunities (e.g., family conflicts, overspending, legal or medical emergencies)
- Ask for permission to raise a sensitive subject
- Use a non-judgmental, compassionate tone and speak in the first person about specifics observed (“I noticed that you got upset when you couldn’t reach the doctor in a timely way.”)
- Normalize issues (“Every family has their challenges”) and provide stories or anecdotes from other families without revealing confidential details
- Have resources ready to offer if the family agrees to get help

# MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF THE FAMILY OFFICE ROLE

In the optimal situation, family members will approach their family offices for solutions to a crisis. In other circumstances, a family office executive may observe situations that are clearly troubling but no one in the family is requesting help. The latter situation can be particularly difficult to navigate, as the executive may be dealing with some of the dysfunctional behaviors (e.g., overspending by a family member who appears volatile and unwilling to stick to a budget) yet feel unsure of how to move forward. How to address the resistance within a family system will vary according to the specifics of the family. Nonetheless, here are some guidelines to consider:

- The individual with the problem issues may not have insight into his or her diagnosis and may resist the idea of help. It can be more effective to involve another family member or other people the individual trusts when starting the conversation.
- Some families worry that care professionals will immediately push for one extreme solution (e.g., “remove all financial support”). Care managers who can offer several options may be able to reduce the family’s initial resistance.
- Moments of crisis may offer a family office executive the opportunity to improve compliance with a plan from both clinical and risk mitigation perspectives. Here is one potential approach: “We have tried to manage this on our own. This recent car accident reflects some gaps in our planning. I want your son to get the help that he needs. I also want to make sure that we are protected from any legal liability. Are you open to me exploring some options?”
- Certain family systems have genetic predisposition toward a specific behavioral health issue, such as substance abuse, and may have several family members who are exhibiting symptoms. Providing general mental health education at a family retreat or facilitating a discussion about the negative impact of dysfunctional behaviors on family legacy can start a much-needed conversation. Through these events, family members

may also benefit from the opportunity to interact privately with a clinical professional to discuss any specific issues of concern.

## Care Manager/Health Advocacy Associations

- Aging Life Care Association: [www.aginglifecare.org](http://www.aginglifecare.org)
- National Association of Healthcare Advocacy: [www.nahac.com](http://www.nahac.com)

# SUMMARY

Medical and psychiatric issues are common in UHNW families. Although these families can afford world-class care, they often need support to help navigate complex medical and psychiatric systems and address underlying family issues. At the same time, family offices and private wealth advisory firms face a tough balance: how to raise difficult conversations without overstepping the boundaries of their roles. Offering a wide array of expertise, care managers can serve as trusted partners to family office professionals, helping solve some of the most challenging health and well-being issues. Patience, preparedness, and professional guidance can often help to ensure that the guidance to families is received in the compassionate way it was intended.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Arden O'Connor founded the O'Connor Professional Group to address the needs of families and individuals struggling with an array of behavioral health issues, including addiction, mental health disorders, eating disorders, learning, and other developmental challenges. With several relatives in recovery, Arden is passionate about helping families and individuals navigate the highly fragmented treatment system in a way that creates positive outcomes and allows families to heal. Arden is a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Business School. She remains heavily involved in community activities, as a board member of Winsor School Corporation, Collaboration for Family Flourishing, Massachusetts Association of Mental Health, and Attorneys for Family Held Enterprises. Previously, she served as a board member for the Justice Resource Institute (former chair), C4 Recovery Solutions, Harvard Club of Boston, Victory Programs, and Harvard Business School Alumni Association of Boston. She maintains professional affiliations with the following organizations: Boston Estate Planning Council, Worthy Circles and Family Firm Institute.